



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Election FAQs: Colombia

Presidential Elections

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Americas

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Election Snapshot

- Election Day: May 29, 2022
- Registered voters: 39,002,239
- Polling stations: 12,513
- Voting booths: 102,152

When is Election Day?

In accordance with Resolution 4371 (May 18, 2021) of the National Civil Registry (RNEC), Colombia will hold its presidential elections May 29, 2022.¹ The RNEC has arranged for 102,152 voting booths in 12,513 polling stations across the country and abroad.²

Who is eligible to vote in these elections?

Voting in Colombia is considered a right but is not a requirement. The Constitution guarantees the right to vote to every Colombian citizen over the age of 18 who has registered his or her national identification document.³ Exceptions are members of security forces (military and police) and individuals convicted of felonies.⁴ The number of citizens expected to vote in these elections is 39,002,239 (20,111,908 women and 18,890,331 men).⁵

Why are these elections important and different from past elections?

Across national media, these elections have been framed as a pivotal political process taking place amid increased polarization and dissatisfaction with “establishment” politics. Furthermore, political parties heavily criticized the National Civil Registry (RNEC) after the legislative elections of March 2022, due to numerous reports of irregularities in the vote pre-count process. In response, Colombia’s election management bodies have made efforts to increase the transparency and inclusivity of the 2022 presidential elections by improving aspects of the electoral process. Some new developments in this electoral cycle include the following:

- **Border centers (*Puestos de Frontera*)**

Due to the break in diplomatic relations between Colombia and Venezuela, it has not been possible to install voting centers in Venezuelan consulates. During this election, the border with Venezuela will be opened temporarily to allow any of the 195,523 eligible individuals living in Venezuela to enter Colombia to vote. Five new voting stations for Colombian residents of Venezuela have been designated in the departments of La Guajira, Norte de Santander, Arauca and Guainía.⁶ These centers were first used during the March congressional elections and will remain available during the presidential election.⁷

¹ https://www.registraduria.gov.co/IMG/pdf/20210922_calendario-electoral-presidente-2022.pdf

² https://twitter.com/Registraduria/status/1520214076919623680?s=20&t=nAakK9Fyyj_DAoaAXiGWhw

³ <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Historia-del-voto-en-Colombia-.html>

⁴ <https://congresovisible.uniandes.edu.co/democracia/participacion/derechoalvoto/>

⁵ <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/39-002-239-colombianos-estan-habilitados-para-votar-en-las-elecciones-de.html>

⁶ https://caracol.com.co/radio/2022/01/26/politica/1643184298_009998.html

⁷ https://twitter.com/DanielPalam/status/1520112697286836224?s=20&t=ICTJUKQkPGddOM_LVyyZ8Q

- **Updated E-14 form**

E-14 forms depict the number of votes that each candidate obtains in each voting booth, as well as invalid and blank votes. They are filled out by poll jurors. For the first time, the RNEC has updated the design of the E-14 forms to increase their clarity and facilitate their use by poll jurors. During the vote pre-count, three versions of the E-14 are filled out. The RNEC uses the first version to update the vote pre-count in its webpage and the second version to inform the media of the status of the pre-count; and electoral authorities use the third during the official vote count.⁸ During Colombia's previous legislative elections, there were major discrepancies between the vote pre-count and the official vote count. Political organizations and local electoral missions attributed these discrepancies to the design of the E-14 forms, which prompted the RNEC to re-design them, among other measures to ensure transparency.⁹

- **Double verification**

The RNEC announced that it will include a double verification mechanism in the transmission stage of the vote pre-count process. After poll jurors fill out E-14 forms with the vote count for each voting booth, transmitters will rally the information in the forms to the RNEC's processing center via telephone. Afterward, the processing center will re-read the received information. If any discrepancies appear, the process must start over, thereby improving the reliability of the pre-count process. Before double verification was implemented, the processing center did not re-read information provided by transmitters, increasing the likelihood of mistakes in the transmission process.¹⁰

Is out-of-country voting allowed? If so, what does this process look like?

Out-of-country voting is allowed and will take place for one full week, from May 23 through May 29, 2022. Colombians who wish to vote abroad must be included in the electoral roll of Colombians abroad. The roll includes 1) Colombian citizens whose ID (*cédula*) is registered in any voting post abroad and 2) all Colombian citizens who, upon turning 18 years old after 2005, processed their citizenship cards for the first time in a consulate and have never been registered elsewhere.¹¹ Voting will take place at the embassy or consulate where each voter is registered, with either an ID or passport used to vote.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

In these elections, citizens will elect Colombia's president and vice president for the 2022-2026 period. The eight candidates are listed below, with their respective vice-presidential formula and political party/movement:

⁸ <https://www.noticiarscn.com/elecciones/que-son-los-formularios-e-14-y-como-puedo-consultarlos-409123>

⁹ <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2022/04/18/asi-sera-el-nuevo-formulario-e-14-para-las-elecciones-presidenciales-en-colombia/>

¹⁰ <https://www.elnuevosiglo.com.co/articulos/04-29-2022-ocho-misiones-de-observacion-internacional-vigilaran-la-primera-vuelta>

¹¹ <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Colombianos-en-el-Exterior,3752-.html#:~:text=Los%20colombianos%20que%20viven%20en,de%20alg%C3%BAn%20candidato%20en%20particular.>

- Ingrid Betancourt and José Luis Esparza Guerrero, for the independent Green Oxygen party (*Partido Verde Oxígeno*).
- Sergio Fajardo and Luis Gilberto Murillo, for the center coalition Center Hope (*Coalición Centro Esperanza*)
- Enrique Gómez Martínez and Carlos Cuartas Quiceno, for the right-wing National Salvation Movement (*Partido Movimiento de Salvación Nacional*)
- Federico Gutierrez and Rodrigo Lara, for the right-wing Team for Colombia coalition (*Equipo por Colombia*)
- Rodolfo Hernandez and Marlen Castillo, for the independent Anti-corruption League (*Liga Anticorrupción*)
- Luis Perez and Seferino Mosquera, for the independent Colombia Thinks Big movement (*Colombia Piensa en Grande*)
- Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez, for the progressive Historic Pact coalition (*Pacto Histórico*)
- Jhon Milton Rodríguez and Sandra de las Lajas Torres, for the evangelical-affiliated Colombia Fair and Free party (*Colombia Justa Libres*)

What are the election management bodies? What are their powers and responsibilities?

Article 120 of the Constitution of Colombia establishes Colombia's Election Management Bodies: the National Civil Registry (RNEC) and the National Electoral Council (CNE).¹²

- **National Electoral Council**

The [CNE](#) is responsible for general oversight of the elections. It is in charge of recognizing the legal status of political organizations, distributing funding for campaigns, ruling on irregularities during the electoral process and declaring the outcomes of electoral processes.¹³ The CNE is made up of nine magistrates who are elected by the Colombian Congress for four-year terms. Magistrates mirror the percentage of representation of parties in Congress. As part of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a 10th magistrate was appointed in 2017, serving as a delegate from the demobilized group.¹⁴

- **National Registry of the Civil State**

The RNEC is responsible for the technical and operational dimension of the electoral process in Colombia. Among its other responsibilities, the RNEC oversees the organization of electoral and citizen participation processes, carries out national civil registration policies, updates the voter roll and oversees the vote counting and result dissemination processes.¹⁵ The RNEC is headed by the national registrar, who is selected for a four-year term by the Supreme Court, the State

¹² <https://www.constitucioncolombia.com/titulo-5/capitulo-1/articulo-120>

¹³ <https://www.cne.gov.co/la-entidad/acerca-del-cne>

¹⁴ <https://www.cne.gov.co/la-entidad/magistrados/2-institucional/82-pablo-julio-cruz-ocampo>

¹⁵ <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Funciones-de-la-Registraduria,3672-.html>

Council and the Constitutional Court through a merit-based process.¹⁶ The current national registrar, Alexander Vega, was appointed in 2019.

What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

Elections in Colombia are regulated by the country's 1991 Political Constitution and 1986 Electoral Code.

Title 9 of the Constitution explicitly addresses voting and electoral processes, as well as the roles and responsibilities of electoral authorities. Under Title 9, the Constitution establishes the National Electoral Council (CNE) and National Civil Registry (RNEC) and stipulates relevant regulations for political participation and electoral activities in Colombia.

The current Electoral Code was adopted Aug. 1, 1986, through Presidential Decree 2241. It outlines technical and operational standards for electoral processes and determines the roles and responsibilities of the RNEC and CNE. Over time, the code has been modified on numerous occasions through laws, presidential decrees and court rulings.¹⁷ The Supreme Court has struck down recent attempts to reform and modernize the Electoral Code.¹⁸

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

Per articles 191 and 204¹⁹ of the Colombian Constitution, the presidency and vice presidency share the same election requirements. The candidate must be Colombian by birth, Colombian citizens and over 30 years old.

How is the election management body protecting the elections and voters from COVID-19?

On June 16, 2020, Colombia's Health Ministry issued Resolution 958, which outlines the biosecurity protocol to be adopted by the National Civil Registry (RNEC) for electoral processes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The resolution is one of the numerous regulatory measures adopted under the state of sanitary emergency declared as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Colombia. Resolution 958 contemplates measures such as guaranteeing social distancing during Election Day; providing accessible hand-washing stations; enforcing the use of masks at voting stands and other relevant facilities; setting up temperature checks at access points; arranging for disinfection, cleaning schedules and waste disposal procedures; and prohibiting the consumption of food in inside areas at polling stations. The full resolution can be found [here](#).

The state of sanitary emergency has been extended through June 30, 2022; however, Colombia's health minister declared that the latest extension "will be a transition period where

¹⁶ <https://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/registrador/preguntas.php>

¹⁷ <https://www.alcaldiabogota.gov.co/sisjur/normas/Norma1.jsp?i=11750>

¹⁸ <https://www.elpais.com.co/colombia/corte-constitucional-tumbo-la-reforma-al-codigo-electoral.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.constitucioncolombia.com/titulo-7/capitulo-1/articulo-191>,
<https://www.constitucioncolombia.com/titulo-7/capitulo-3/articulo-204>

some measures will be moderated and others will be fully eliminated.”²⁰ In this sense, it is unclear whether the measures outlined in Resolution 958 will be fully enforced in future electoral processes. At the time of publication, neither the health ministry nor the RNEC have issued updated guidelines regarding the upcoming presidential election.

What is the election management body doing to ensure transparency in the electoral process?

After facing backlash because of significant discrepancies between the pre-vote count and the official vote count during the legislative elections in March 2022, the National Civil Registry (RNEC) implemented different strategies to address issues with the vote pre-count process and ensure transparency during the presidential election. The redesign of the E-14 forms was the first remediation strategy. The forms are now larger, with larger spaces to add information, and include the candidates’ pictures and logos.²¹

The RNEC also announced that it would replace all poll jurors assigned to the 5,109 voting booths where vote pre-count issues linked to the E-14 forms were reported during the congressional elections.²² Those poll jurors were also excluded from the RNEC’s juror database, ensuring they will not be selected for future electoral processes. As an additional measure to improve the accuracy of the vote pre-count process, the RNEC will use a double verification mechanism during the transmission stage, entailing a re-reading of the results transmitted from polling stations to the RNEC’s processing center. After poll jurors fill out the E-14 forms with the vote count from each voting booth, transmitters will relay the information in the forms to the RNEC’s processing center via telephone. Afterward, the processing center will re-read the received information; if any discrepancies arise, the process must start over, improving the reliability of the pre-count process.²³

Lastly, the RNEC announced that it would carry out three full pre-election drills, which it encouraged members of national and international observation missions to witness. The pre-count drill took place May 14; the E-14 digitization drill took place May 18; and the official scrutiny drill will take place May 20 and 21. The RNEC also carried out a functionality test in Colombia’s consulates May 5 and 6.²⁴

²⁰ <https://www.elheraldo.co/colombia/el-abece-de-las-nuevas-medidas-sanitarias-que-rigen-partir-del-1-de-mayo-903905>

²¹ <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2022/04/18/asi-sera-el-nuevo-formulario-e-14-para-las-elecciones-presidenciales-en-colombia/>

²² <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2022/04/18/asi-sera-el-nuevo-formulario-e-14-para-las-elecciones-presidenciales-en-colombia/>

<https://twitter.com/registraduria/status/1521802911638077441?s=21&t=t3MY788hWRzb3bRZDQGi-w>

²³ <https://www.elnuevosiglo.com.co/articulos/04-29-2022-ocho-misiones-de-observacion-internacional-vigilaran-la-primera-vuelta>

²⁴ https://caracol.com.co/radio/2022/05/06/politica/1651861576_018608.html

<https://twitter.com/registraduria/status/1521802911638077441?s=21&t=t3MY788hWRzb3bRZDQGi-w>

How will the election management body ensure the physical safety of voters and a peaceful electoral process?

The National Civil Registry (RNEC) has produced education materials outlining security recommendations for candidates and training materials for members of the armed forces that will accompany the electoral process. The materials are publicly available through the RNEC's Integral Electoral Training System.²⁵

Moreover, there is broad coordination between the RNEC, the National Police, the Attorney General's Office and the Army to ensure that citizens in conflict-affected regions can exercise their right to vote.²⁶ The national government identified 99 municipalities that will face relevant security risks during the presidential elections and deemed 50 of those municipalities priority risk concerns.²⁷ The government also pledged 1.3 billion Colombian pesos to ensure that at-risk candidates can rely on a robust protection scheme, facilitated by the police and the National Protection Unit.²⁸

What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups?

Electoral law allots protections that secure voting rights regardless of physical ability. Article 16 of Law 163 of 1994 guarantees the right for any Colombian to enter the voting booth accompanied by a person of his or her choice for reasons of disability, health or old age.²⁹ A 2003 Constitutional Court ruling determined that braille ballots must also be made available for voters with visual impairments.³⁰ Furthermore, the National Civil Registry produced guidelines for members of the public forces to avoid instances of discrimination and violence against members of the transgender community,³¹ and it issued a separate protocol designed to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to fully exercise their right to vote.³²

How will voting on Election Day work?

Registered voters are advised to arrive at their assigned polling places early May 29 and to bring their national ID. Voters can check their assigned polling location on the National Civil Registry's website.³³ Voting begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 4 p.m. Upon entering the voting booth, each voter will receive a single ballot depicting the eight presidential candidates, with their respective vice-presidential formulas, as well as a blank vote option (*voto en blanco*) that allows voters to express their disapproval with all candidates by choosing none of them. Voters will mark their choices according to directions and place their ballots in the ballot box. If a voter

²⁵ <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/sites/-Sistema-Integral-de-Capacitacion-Electoral/>

²⁶ <https://www.pulzo.com/elecciones-2022/meta-seguridad-elecciones-presidenciales-PP1404755A>

²⁷ <https://www.asuntoslegales.com.co/actualidad/gobierno-implemento-las-primeras-medidas-para-garantizar-seguridad-en-elecciones-3353740>

²⁸ <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/partidos-politicos/gobierno-pone-en-marcha-plan-para-blindar-a-los-candidatos-en-elecciones-641731>

²⁹ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=37781>

³⁰ <https://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/2003/T-487-03.htm>

³¹ <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/sites/-Sistema-Integral-de-Capacitacion-Electoral/>

³² <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/sites/-Sistema-Integral-de-Capacitacion-Electoral/>

³³ <https://eleccioncolombia.registraduria.gov.co>

makes a mistake while filling out the ballot, he or she may request a new ballot from a poll juror. All voters receive certificates that entitle them to a half-day of paid leave from their places of work, among other benefits.³⁴

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

Multiple national and international groups will exercise observational roles during the 2022 presidential elections. Individuals, civil society groups and specialized election organizations from around Colombia and the world will observe in different capacities to help ensure the free exercise of voting rights and evaluate the quality of the election. Their roles and credentials are equal to those of any observer; however, depending on their expertise, observers can have access to different information.

Regarding national observation, election witnesses (*testigos electorales*) are observers appointed by and representing political parties, political movements, National Electoral Council (CNE)-recognized election observation groups and other significant civic groups that register candidates for party and government positions. According to Article 121 of the Colombian Electoral Code, each of these groups has the right to appoint an observer to each polling place and recount center to observe vote counting and recounting processes and to report any irregularities to the CNE. The CNE conducts background checks on appointed election witnesses before issuing their credentials, which municipal register officials verify on Election Day. Election witnesses can also request an immediate recount by the poll jurors at their respective polling places.³⁵

National organizations can also observe during Election Day. This is the case for the Electoral Observation Mission (*Misión de Observación Electoral*, MOE), a national collective of local civil society organizations that trains and deploys citizen volunteers to observe outside of polling places. MOE volunteers have observed all national elections since 2006, helping record Election Day statistics and irregularities to create election quality measures in cooperation with the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights–Center for Electoral Promotion and Assistance.^{36,37}

International observers can participate in Colombia's elections upon authorization by the National Electoral Council, per Article 45 of Law 1475 of 2011³⁸ and Resolution 3088 of 2011.³⁹ The National Civil Registry announced that at least eight international observation missions will be present in Colombia's upcoming presidential election, including the European Union, the

³⁴ <https://www.eltiempo.com/elecciones-2022/actualidad-electoral/elecciones-presidenciales-2022-beneficios-electorales-en-colombia-644802>

³⁵ <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Testigos-electorales,1097-.html>

³⁶ <https://www.datoselectorales.org/observacion-electoral/>

³⁷ <https://www.moe.org.co/observacion-electoral/observacion-eleccion-de-autoridades-nacionales/>

³⁸ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=43332>

³⁹ <https://www.leyex.info/leyes/Resolucioncne3088de2011.htm>

Organization of American States and Electoral Transparency.⁴⁰ Official confirmation by the CNE is expected in the coming days.

How will votes be counted?

The first stage in the vote count process is the pre-count (*preconteo de votos*). Its purpose is to consolidate and announce the election results as quickly as possible after polling places close at 4 p.m. on Election Day. These results are purely informative and do not have legal value.⁴¹ Title 7 of the Electoral Code establishes that poll jurors must use E-14 forms to tally the ballots at each voting booth immediately after the polls close. As each voting booth finishes the pre-count, the information in the E-14 forms is transmitted via telephone to the National Civil Registry (RNEC) processing center by a designated collector. The processing center transcribes and digitalizes the provided information, later publishing status updates for the general pre-count process on the RNEC's website.⁴²

Next, local scrutinizing commissions made up of judges, public notaries and registrars, which operate at the district, municipal and auxiliary levels, count and inspect the tallies at the voting centers. Law 1475 of 2011 requires these local scrutinizing commissions to be present at their respective sites at 3:30 p.m. on Election Day and to begin their work as soon as they receive the poll jurors' electoral tally sheets.⁴³ They also perform initial recounts for each voting booth when needed.⁴⁴ Once the local scrutinizing commissions complete their counts, inspections and recounts, they deliver the scrutinized tally sheets to a representative of the RNEC to digitize. These forms are signed by poll jurors and published on the RNEC's website so all candidates and citizens can track the results from each polling station in real time.^{45, 46}

The next step in producing official results falls to the general scrutinizing commissions, composed of qualified delegates of the National Electoral Council (CNE). These commissions verify the results of the quick counts and local scrutiny at the department level according to Chapter 4 of the Electoral Code. Article 43 of Law 1475 of 2011 indicates that these general scrutinizing commissions begin their work at 9 a.m. on the Tuesday following Election Day.⁴⁷ Besides verifying the results of the first counts and scrutiny based on completed tally sheets, the general scrutinizing commissions resolve any requests for recounts from local scrutinizing commissions. Once they confirm the results, the general scrutinizing commissions send any unresolved disputes to the CNE. Article 187 of the Electoral Code states that the nine magistrates of the CNE, along with the national registrar or his or her delegate, will review unresolved disputes and make an unappealable decision to definitively determine the official results of the election.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ <https://www.elnuevosiglo.com.co/articulos/04-29-2022-ocho-misiones-de-observacion-internacional-vigilaran-la-primera-vuelta>

⁴¹ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=9029>

⁴² <https://www.canalinstitucional.tv/preconteo-escrutinio-que-es-como-se-hace>

⁴³ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=43332>

⁴⁴ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=9029>

⁴⁵ <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Escrutadores,274->

⁴⁶ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=43332>

⁴⁷ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=43332>

⁴⁸ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=9029>

When and how will official results be announced?

While preliminary results are announced as early as Election Night, official results will not be known until the entire vote counting process is finished. According to the Electoral Code of 1986 and Law 6 of 1990, official results are announced after the scrutinizing commissions and the National Electoral Council complete the vote counting process.⁴⁹ In theory, the process could finish in as little as one week, but the verification of results and resolution of disputes can extend the timeline to as much as several weeks after Election Day.⁵⁰

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

According to Article 164 of the Electoral Code, candidates, their representatives and accredited electoral witnesses may request a recount by the scrutinizing commission at any given voting station. Scrutinizing commissions are assigned to the vote scrutiny process at the auxiliary/zonal, district/municipal and national levels. For scrutiny at the auxiliary/zonal and district/municipal levels, the commissions are appointed by the judicial district's Superior Tribunal (*Tribunal Superior del Distrito Judicial*). Each consists of two citizens who must be certified judges, notaries or public instrument registrars. At the national level, the commission is appointed by the National Electoral Council (CNE) and consists of two citizens who have served as magistrates at the Supreme Court, Council of State, CNE or Superior Tribunal.⁵¹

Requests for recounts must be submitted in writing to the CNE or its delegates and must be based on one of the irregularities listed in Article 192 of the Electoral Code. The scrutinizing commission has the right to review and deny a request unless poll juror tallies reflect a difference of 10 percent or more between vote counts; corrections or other markings are found on vote count sheets; or if there is any doubt among the members of the scrutinizing commission as to the accuracy of the poll jurors' counts. Per Article 193 of the Electoral Code, requests for recounts can be issued throughout the district, municipal and auxiliary scrutiny process or during the general scrutiny carried out by CNE delegates.⁵²

The general scrutinizing commissions send any unresolved disputes to the CNE. Article 187 of the Electoral Code states that the 10 magistrates of the CNE, along with the National Registrar or his or her delegate, must review unresolved disputes and make an unappealable decision to definitively determine the official results of the election.⁵³

⁴⁹ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=9028>

⁵⁰ <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Escrutinio-.html>

⁵¹ <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Escrutinio-.html#:~:text=Las%20comisiones%20escrutadoras%20distritales%20y,en%20el%20respectivo%20distrito%20judicial>

⁵² <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=9029>

⁵³ <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=9029>

Resources

- Constitution of Colombia ([Spanish](#), [English](#))
- Electoral Code ([Spanish](#))
- National Electoral Council (CNE) ([Spanish](#))
- National Civil Registry (RNEC) ([Spanish](#))

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Colombian election authorities as of May 19, 2022, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.